



# Media and Communication Policy

|                     | Name               | Position                                | Signature                                                                            | Date       |
|---------------------|--------------------|-----------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------|
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## **1. Purpose**

The purpose of this policy is to provide understanding and guidance for the appropriate use of communication tools to engage with and inform Council's internal and external audiences. This policy will be implemented through Council's Media and Communication Strategy.

## **2. Scope**

The Media and Communication Policy applies to Council officials including Councillors, Council employees, people on work experience, volunteers, committee members, consultants and contractors.

## **3. Objective**

This policy sets out the approved means and areas of responsibility for developing and implementing communication processes, practices and resources that are:

- a. consistent, timely, accurate and responsive to community needs, while allowing Council to efficiently and effectively deliver quality services.
- b. informative and promote awareness about Council's decisions, policies, programs, projects and activities.
- c. easily accessible and available in multiple formats to accommodate diverse information needs within the community.
- d. open and transparent, encouraging a two-way communication process through a variety of channels.
- e. vibrant and positive to build civic pride through a positive image of the Murrumbidgee Local Government Area.
- f. respectful of the democratic process acknowledging Council resolutions represent the majority view.
- g. compliant with all relevant legislation and adhering to the highest standards of ethical practice and professional competence.

## **4. Policy statement**

Murrumbidgee Council is committed to building positive and lasting partnerships with its audiences through effective two-way, transparent communication.

The following guidelines must be observed when engaging with Council's audiences through the various communication tools that Council utilises. This includes, but is not limited to, digital media (website, social media and electronic direct mail), print and broadcast media, advertising and printed material.

## **5. Policy principles**

### **Branding requirements**

All public communication materials must adhere to and reflect Council's adopted identity as outlined in Murrumbidgee Council's Style Guide.



## **6. Policy implementation**

### **6.1 Broadcast and print media**

Murrumbidgee Council is committed to building a positive working relationship with the media and also to keeping the community informed and engaged by proactively issuing regular, informative and accurate statements to the media.

#### **6.1.1 Authorised Council media representatives**

- a. The Mayor is the principal public spokesperson on matters relating to the representative Council, decisions of Council and the community. He/she may delegate the Deputy Mayor or another Councillor to speak on his/her behalf.
- b. The General Manager, in his/her statutory role, is the lead spokesperson on operational matters relating to Council. He/she may delegate other staff members to act as spokesperson on operational matters.
- c. Councillors have a right to express their own views to the media in their role as a member of the governing body and as a representative of the community. However, they must make it clear their views do not necessarily represent the position of Council. Communications with the media must be in accordance with Council's Code of Conduct for Councillors.
- d. Council employees, service providers, contractors, people on work experience and volunteers must not communicate with the media in an official capacity unless prior approval has been obtained from the General Manager.
- e. Council employees, service providers, contractors, people on work experience and volunteers may communicate with the media as private individuals, with the following restrictions:
  - i. they must not comment on Council policies or business, staff, confidential legal advice or commercial-in-confidence matters, nor make predictions as to future actions of Council.
  - ii. they must not be identified as Council officials.
  - iii. their comments must not be perceived as representing an official Council position or policy.
- f. Communications with the media must be in accordance with Council's relevant Codes of Conduct.

#### **6.1.2 Media relations**

- a. All media enquiries must be referred to the Media and Communications Officer, or in his/her absence to the General Manager, the Mayor or a member of staff nominated by the General Manager.
- b. Media statements are to be prepared by the Media and Communications Officer (or another person delegated by the General Manager) using the approved media release template.
- c. Media statements must be approved by the General Manager or Mayor prior to release.
- d. All Council documents that are on the public record are open to perusal by the media, except those relating to staff, confidential legal advice and commercial-in-confidence matters. All file perusals by the media are subject to the provisions of Council policies dealing with access to information, privacy and freedom of information legislation.



- e. All Council and Committee meetings are open to the media, except those dealing with staff, confidential legal advice or commercial-in-confidence matters.
- f. All requests to film or photograph Council staff, facilities or events for news and current affairs purposes must be referred to the Media and Communications Officer.
- g. Unauthorised release of Council documents by Council officials will be referred to the relevant Council's Code of Conduct.

## **6.2 Digital communications - Website**

Council's website shall conform to a minimum Level AA of the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines version 2 (WCAG 2.1).

Requests for website content should be referred to the Media and Communications Officer or authorised staff administrators.

## **6.3 Digital communications - Social media**

Social media is a valuable tool for Council to communicate and engage with its audience/s using the various online platforms.

### **6.3.1 Authorised social media representatives**

- a. The Media and Communications Officer has overall responsibility for administering, posting content, monitoring, moderating and responding to comments on Council's social media sites.
- b. Other Council officials may be given editorial privileges by the General Manager. This includes designated staff who have responsibility for administering sites related to specific operations of Council, for example Jerilderie Library.
- c. In keeping with Council's Codes of Conduct, Council officials must ensure social media platforms, when used in an official capacity, are free from any form of verbal abuse, intimidation, harassment or discriminatory language/behaviour and that all users are treated equally, fairly and respectfully.
- d. Council officials must ensure the privacy and confidentiality of information acquired at work is protected at all times and treated in accordance with relevant laws and policies.
- e. Those with editorial roles should ensure content they post is credible, accurate, thorough and transparent and does not disclose confidential information, express personal opinions, share Murrumbidgee Council intellectual property or make predictions on future actions Council may take.
- f. Those with editorial roles should ensure content adheres to the Terms of Use of the social media channel being used, as well as copyright, privacy, defamation, discrimination and other laws.

To keep Council's social media channels active, responsive and well-maintained, it is the responsibility of Council's social media administrators to:

- a. Post regularly (minimum twice per week)
- b. Monitor channels frequently and respond to comments in a timely, professional and appropriate manner (within 24 hours on weekdays).



- c. Notify the General Manager or relevant Council manager of any negative commentary that may impact Council's reputation and seek advice for an appropriate response.
- d. Capture posts, comments and Council's responses in Council's electronic records management system.
- e. Analyse engagement data to ensure the communications activities are effective.

### **6.3.2 General guidelines for comments made on Council's social media channels**

- a. Council will not tolerate content that breaches copyright, privacy, defamation, discrimination, harassment and other laws. Such content will be removed and may be referred to the authorities.
- b. Users who breach Council's Media and Communication Policy may be banned from accessing Council's social media sites.

### **6.3.3 Personal use of social media**

- a. Council officials must ensure personal comments made on social media platforms cannot be mistaken for the official view of Council or have an impact on another Council official.
- b. Council officials must ensure that any personal comments do not compromise their capacity to perform their public role in an unbiased manner. Such comments (made in a personal capacity) about Council, its activities or programs should not be derogatory or defamatory.
- c. Council officials must ensure they do not reveal any confidential information relating to Council when using a social media platform privately.
- d. The provisions of Council's Codes of Conduct and relevant legislation must be considered if making any form of comment about any Council business or official.

## **6.4 Electronic Direct Mail (e-newsletters)**

Electronic Direct Mail (EDM) is a form of digital marketing sent to a list of email subscribers.

Staff working on EDMs will manage all personal data collected for email marketing in accordance with the Privacy and Personal Information Protection Act.

## **6.5 Other communication tools**

Other communication tools utilised by Council include advertising, publications, signage, public displays, email signature banners, videos and word of mouth.

Council officials must ensure they adhere to the elements of this policy (particularly branding guidelines) and also the relevant Council Codes of Conduct.

## **6.6 Records management**

Council's communication activities should adhere to Council's records management policies and other legislative requirements.





## 7. Emergency and crisis management

In the event of an emergency, Council plays a pivotal role in disseminating information to the community via our communication channels.

- a. The General Manager must be notified immediately of the details of the emergency or crisis.
- b. The Media and Communications Officer will provide assistance on an as-needed basis in close consultation with the General Manager, Mayor and other designated Council officials.
- c. All requests to interview, film or photograph Council staff involved in the incident must be referred to the General Manager or the Media and Communications Officer

## 8. Non-compliance with this policy

Failure to comply with this policy may be dealt with in accordance with Council's relevant Code of Conduct, Local Government (State) Award or other laws.

## 9. Definitions

This policy's definitions are:

**Community** means all people who live or work in the Murrumbidgee Council Local Government Area.

**Council** means Murrumbidgee Council.

**Council official** means Councillors, Council staff, volunteers or delegated persons as defined in the Local Government Act 1993.

**Council spokesperson:** A person authorised to communicate with the media on Council's behalf.

**Media:** Relates to all forms of official communication including, but not limited to print and digital media. Digital media can include all forms of online media, including Council's website and presence on social media.

**Media statement or comment:** A verbal or written statement issued by the Council that states its position on a matter of Council business, Council policy or public interest.

**Staff** means all employees of Murrumbidgee Council (full time, part time, casual, contractors and temporary).

**Social media** is the term used for internet and mobile-based channels and tools that allow users to interact with each other and share opinions and content. It refers to user-generated information, opinion and other content shared and discussed over open digital networks.



## **10. References and related documents**

The following legislation and/or guidelines are applicable to this policy:

### **Murrumbidgee Council documents**

- a. Statement of Vision and Priorities
- b. Code of Conduct for Councillors
- c. Code of Conduct for staff
- d. Code of Conduct for Council committee members, delegates of Council and Council advisors
- e. Style Guide
- f. Communication Strategy
- g. Social Media Register
- h. Complaints Management Policy
- i. Internet, intranet, email and computer use management policy
- j. Privacy Management Policy

### **Legislation and professional guidelines**

- a. Freedom of Information Act 1982
- b. Privacy and Personal Information Protection Act 1998
- c. Local Government Act 1993
- d. Copyright Act 1968
- e. Defamation Act 2005
- f. Government Information (Public Access) Act 2009
- g. Web Content Accessibility Guidelines version 2 (WCAG 2.1)

## **11. Policy implementation**

Council officers should refer to the Community Engagement Policy when organising public meetings, public consultation or public forums on behalf of Council.

## **12. Exceptions**

Nil

## **13. Policy Review**

This policy is due to be reviewed in September 2022.

